

"ROME"

(Lynn Cohick)

Known as the Eternal City, Rome captured the imaginations and terrified the hearts of many from its rise to power in the fifth century BC to its fall in the fifth century AD. Rome's origins reach back into myth and legend. The Latins who settled Rome trace their ancestry to Aeneas, son of the goddess Venus and defender of Troy, whose adventures are recounted by Virgil in *The Aeneid* (first century BC). Among Aeneas's descendants were twin boys, Remus and Romulus, who are credited with founding Rome in 753 BC. Legend asserts that as infants the twins were left to die near the banks of the Tiber River, but were suckled by a she-wolf, Lupa Capitolina, who came to represent Rome itself (Livy, *History of Rome* 1.4). Julius Caesar and his adopted son Octavian (later Emperor Augustus) traced their ancestry back to Aeneas and Venus.

Rome sits on the western side of the Italian peninsula, positioned at the northern border of the Latium region. The Etruscans were their neighbors to the north, and Campania lay south of Latium. The region enjoyed sufficient rainfall and fertile soil to support a large population center. The earliest settlers lived on the hills, which rose on the eastern shores of the Tiber River. The seven hills of Rome (Aventine, Caelian, Capitoline, Esquiliae, Palatine, Quirinal, Viminal) became an identity marker for the city, so that when John in Revelation makes reference to the "seven hills" (17:9), his audience understands he is alluding to the "great city" (17:18). Near the Capitoline hill, an island in the Tiber disrupted the fast flowing river, making a natural fjord at this point. The Tiber's currents facilitated trade, as they were navigable by barges and small boats for quite a distance inland. Approximately sixteen miles from Rome, the Tiber emptied into the Mediterranean Sea at the port of Ostia.

In the seventh and sixth centuries BC, a marshy area between the Capitoline, Palatine, and Esquiline hills was drained, the Roman forum was built upon the resulting field, and temples to Vulcan and Vesta (the god and goddess of fire, hearth, and family) were erected. On the Capitoline hill, a large temple to Jupiter was constructed. When the seventh and final king of Rome was overthrown in about 510 BC Rome established itself as a Republic, and in about 500 BC, the temple of Saturn was constructed in the Forum; it served as Rome's treasury and repository of the Senate's decrees. What would become the Circus Maximus was at this early stage a dirt race track located in the valley between the Palatine and Aventine hills. Legend places the Rape of the Sabines here. By Augustus's time (ruled 27 BC-AD 14), 150,000 spectators watched chariot races from bleachers extending around three-quarters of the oval track.

In 390 BC the Gauls attacked and burned Rome to the ground. Undaunted by this defeat, Romans chose to rebuild the city quickly without central planning, which explains why it does not follow the typical grid pattern (Livy, *History of Rome* 5:55). They restored and expanded their city walls, encompassing approximately seven hundred acres. They also built aqueducts, at first



underground; then under emperor Claudius (AD 41-54), an elevated aqueduct 43 miles long brought water into the city. In 312 BC the foundations were laid for the famous road, the Villa Apia. Approximately 350 miles long at its completion fifty years later, it was one of the oldest and most well-known roads, going south to Capua and then stretching Southeast to the Adriatic Sea. Along this road many tombs of wealthy Romans have been uncovered, including the elaborate first-century-AD tomb of Cecilia Metella.

Having control of most of the Italian peninsula, Rome turned its attention to the powerful city of Carthage in North Africa. In 241 BC, Rome bested Carthage in the first Punic War; within twenty years, however, the Carthaginian general, Hannibal, marched across the Alps and approached Rome. While preparing to attack the city, Hannibal was called back to Carthage, which was besieged by Scipio Africanus (who defeated it in 202 BC). Wealth poured into Rome. By the end of the third century BC, Rome was the largest city in Italy, rivaling contemporary Alexandria, Egypt, and Antioch in Syria. Wealthy politicians and later the emperors built their residences mainly on the Palatine hill, and the Forum became a place of grand public buildings (*basilicae*). Through the center ran the Via Sacra, the parade route for victorious generals and later emperors.

During the first century BC Rome was consumed with civil wars. In the late 50s BC Julius Caesar enlarged the Roman Forum to the northeast, which Augustus and later emperors expanded. Caesar's murder plunged the city into another bloody Civil War, with most Romans longing for peace. The subsequent rise to power of his adopted son, Octavian, signaled the end of the Republic in the beginning of Imperial Rome. The new emperor recorded his accomplishments in the *Res Gestae*, wherein he declares he built or refurbished eighty-two temples in Rome, often using marble instead of brick in construction. For example, the Pantheon was constructed to honor all the gods; it was refurbished by Hadrian in the early second century AD. To honor Augustus's victories in Spain, the Senate commissioned the *Ara Pacis*, a monumental altar to Peace completed in 9 BC. The altar was enclosed by a marble screen decorated with reliefs portraying the imperial family and mythological scenes of Romulus and Remus, as well as Aeneas's adventures.

In AD 64 a great fire burned for six days and seven nights, consuming roughly 70 percent of the city. According to the historian Tacitus (*Annals* 15.38), it began at the Circus and quickly spread through the overcrowded wooden structures, creating havoc and destruction. The people blamed Nero, who deflected their accusations on to Christians, brutally killing many. Nero's suicide in AD 68 threw the city into disarray, but within a year the great general Vespasian became emperor (ruled AD 69-79). His son, Titus, quelled the Jewish rebellion in the Roman province of Palestine and sacked Jerusalem (including the temple) in AD 70; an arch commemorating that victory was commissioned by the Senate in AD 81 after his death. The monument includes a relief of Roman soldiers carrying away pillaged treasures from the Jerusalem temple. The Colosseum, perhaps the best known building today in Rome, was commissioned by Vespasian to house gladiatorial games. The fifty thousand-seat amphitheater was built in no small part by Jewish slaves using plunder taken after the Jewish War. The Colosseum, finished by Titus in AD 80, was built over the private, artificial lake created by Nero, the external walls were covered with marble, and statues graced the many niches.

Outside the city walls can be found catacombs, burial tunnels used by Jews residing in Rome beginning in the first century BC. Inscriptions indicate there were at least thirteen synagogues within Rome. In the second century AD, Christians also used catacombs as burial sites, though these did not overlap with Jewish catacombs.